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Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein (Phil. 492)

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Class meets: MW 9.30-11.00

Aims of the course

The course introduces students to one of the most influential philosophical movements of the Twentieth Century. We trace the development of what might be called “early analytic philosophy,” from its origins in the work of Gottlob Frege, through its development in the writings of Bertrand Russell to its culmination in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Some central themes include: logicism, the nature of the proposition, the analysis of generality, the distinction between sense (*Sinn*) and reference (*Bedeutung*), the set-theoretical and semantic paradoxes (and attempts to resolve them), and the nature of nonsense. No previous exposure to the writings of these figures is presupposed, but proficiency in elementary logic is presumed.

Course requirements

There will be one short paper (5 pages) due around mid-term, and a longer paper (6-8 pages for undergraduates, 10-12 for graduate students) due on the last day of classes. There will also be an in-class writing assignment in the final meeting of class.

The form of the in-class writing assignment will be as follows: students will have to answer three questions from six questions distributed one week in advance of the exercise (*which* three will not be revealed in advance). The exercise will take 45 minutes.

Breakdown of grade

The first paper assignment will be worth 20% of the final grade, the second 35% and the in-class writing exercise 35%. Participation will be worth 10% of the final grade.

Policy on extensions and late papers

I will not grant extensions without a *very* good reason (for example, medical reasons)—in particular, pressure of work will *not* count as a good reason—and I will be imposing a grade-reduction for papers submitted late without a *pre-arranged* extension.

Syllabus

Gottlob Frege

Topic [1]: Frege's Project in the Foundations of Arithmetic/Analysis of the concept of number
(4-5 meetings—note these are estimates based on a MW schedule)

Reading

The Foundations of Arithmetic, (aka. 'Die Grundlagen') trans. J. Austin, Preface, §§ 1–28, §§ 45-79 and "conclusion" §§ 87–91.

“On Function and Concept” in Beaney

Potter, Michael: *Reason's Nearest Kin*, ch. 2, in coursepack (an overview especially relevant to topics 1, 2, 4 of the Frege unit).

Topic [2]: Frege's Conception of Logic in the Begriffsschrift
(2 meetings)

Begriffsschrift selections from Beaney

Letter to Marty, 29.8.1882, pp. 79–83 in Beaney

“On the Scientific Justification of a Begriffsschrift,” in coursepack

Topic [3]: Sense and Reference
(3 meetings)

Re-read: *Begriffsschrift* § 8 in Beaney

“On Sinn and Bedeutung,” in Beaney

“Comments on Sinn and Bedeutung” in Beaney

Letter to Husserl 24.5.1891 in Beaney

Letter to Jourdain, 1914 in Beaney

Evans, Gareth: *The Varieties of Reference*, ch. 1, in coursepack

David Bell: How ‘Russellian’ Was Frege?

Recommended but optional:

Makin, Gideon: *The Metaphysicians of Meaning*, pp. 81–127 in coursepack

Topic [4]: Frege's Logicism and Russell's Paradox
(3 meetings)

Excerpts from *Grundgesetze*, pp. 194–223 in Beaney.

Letter to Russell 22. 6. 1902 in Beaney.

Two technical handouts available on Richard Heck's web page:

Handout 1. <http://emerson.fas.harvard.edu/heck/pdf/notes/fregesproofs.pdf>

Handout 2. <http://emerson.fas.harvard.edu/heck/pdf/notes/begriffsschrift.pdf>

Topic [5]: The Concept Horse Problem

(1 meeting)

“On Concept and Object” in Beaney

“Comments on *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*” in Beaney

Parsons, Terence: “Why Frege should not have said ‘The Concept *Horse* is not a concept,’” in coursepack. (Omit section XI.)

Bertrand Russell

Topic [1]: Russell against the English Idealists

(1 meeting)

Joachim, Harold: “The Nature of Truth,” ch 3, part ii, “Degrees of Truth” pp. 85–121.
(Read quickly for a flavour of the English Idealist’s position: there’s no need to slave over the details.)

Russell, Bertrand, *My Philosophical Development*, ch. 5 “Revolt into Pluralism” in coursepack. (important)

—*The Principles of Mathematics*, Preface to the first edition (important)

Topic [2]: Russell’s conception of the proposition/The ‘first theory of Denoting’

(2 meetings)

The Principles of Mathematics §§ 46–93.

“On Denoting,” in coursepack (read especially closely the so-called “*Gray’s Elegy* Argument,” but don’t expect to understand it without reading Makin), pp. 48–50

Makin, Gideon: chs. 1–2, in coursepack

Topic [3]: On Denoting: Russell’s criticism of the first theory of the Denoting/the theory of Descriptions, and the Description Theory of Names

(2 meetings)

“On Denoting”, in coursepack

Principia Mathematica pp. 66–67, in coursepack

Sainsbury, Mark: Russell, ch IV, § 1, in coursepack

Makin, Gideon, ch 3., in coursepack

Topic [4]: Russell’s response(s) to the Paradoxes

(2 meetings)

Principia Mathematica, pp. 38–41, 79.

Sainsbury *Russell*, pp. 308–316

Potter, Michael: *Reason’s Nearest Kin*, ch. 5.

The Early Wittgenstein

Topic [1]: The world as the totality of facts.

(2 meetings)

Letter to Russell of August 19th, 1919 in *Notebooks*, pp. 130–1

Tractatus propositions 1 through 2.063, and 3.2–3.263.

(Students should also be sure to read ahead—less closely—to proposition 2.225, so as to get a sense of where we are heading.)

Stenius, Erik., ch. 3. "The Concept of a *Sachverhalt*," in coursepack

Fogelin, Robert, ch. 1. "The Atomistic Ontology of the *Tractatus*," in coursepack

Anscombe, Elizabeth, Introduction to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, ch. 1. "Elementary Propositions," in coursepack

Topic [2]: The picture theory of the proposition.

(2 meetings)

Tractatus: 2.1–3.144, 3.4–3.42, 4.01–4.061, 4.12–4.1212, 4.2, 4.461–4.4661.

Notebooks pp. 7–9.

Sullivan, Peter: "A version of the picture theory," in coursepack

Topic [3]: Wittgenstein's 'Transcendental Argument' for Substance

(1 meeting)

Tractatus 2.024–2.034, 3.3442, 4.023, 4.2–4.24, 5.553–5.5571.

Kant, Critique of Pure Reason. The first analogy of experience. A182/B 224–A189–B232.

Proops, Ian "Wittgenstein on the Substance of the World," EJP April 2004, on my web page and in coursepack

Topic [4]: Logical Syntax, Nonsense, the sign/symbol distinction, and Wittgenstein's resolution of the paradoxes.

(2 meetings)

Tractatus: 3.318–3.3441; 5.473, 5.4732, 5.4733,

Notebooks 'Moore Notes'

Diamond: "What Nonsense Might be," in coursepack

Proops: "Logical Syntax in the *Tractatus*," on my web page and in coursepack